

country whose rural regions have long been forgotten, could prove damaging to the country as a whole.

The governors' movement, called the southern bloc, has stirred enough concern that new life has been injected into proposed congressional legislation that would sanction local officials who are seen as meddling in the peace process. The bill was first proposed last fall, before the governors took office.

"These governors are popularly elected, and they are realizing a program contrary to their duties: dividing the state," said Fernando Giraldo, dean of the political science department at the Javeriana University in Bogotá.

Because of the southern bloc, said Mr. Giraldo, Colombia is "before the international community displaying a fragmented voice, the president on one side and the governors on the other."

In interviews, the governors said their goal is not to destabilize. Rather, they said, the aim is simply to draw attention to their region's problems and to obtain resources for regional public projects and agricultural development programs seen as alternatives to defoliation.

If the aid comes from Bogotá, so be it, the governors say; but they say they will continue to appeal to foreign governments, too. The southern bloc's proposals are still in the planning stages, and little financial support has gone their way.

"What we want for the regions, for the provinces as well as the towns, is the possibility to express ourselves," said Mr. Jaramillo, speaking in his office overlooking a public square here in Ibagué, the capital of the province of Tolima. "That is why we've gone out to explain our ideas, and present what we think is a bit different from the national government's concepts."

The governors said that they supported Mr. Pastrana's peace efforts and respected his authority when it came to negotiating, but they said they wanted the particular concerns of their provinces to be aired by local officials in those talks with the insurgencies.

The governors and other provincial officials also hinted, as many local officials in Colombia do, that the government should open dialogue with paramilitary groups, something Mr. Pastrana's government has refused. Recently, in fact, Mr. Jaramillo met with the paramilitary leader, Carlos Castaño, and also paid a visit to the rebels.

"What we've said is we cannot sign a peace pact, but we can do a peace process," said Floro Tunubalá, the governor of Cauca. "And to do a peace process means talking."

The southern bloc is a mixture of traditionalists and upstarts. They include Parmenio Cuéllar of Nariño, a former senator and minister of justice, and Mr. Jaramillo, a pediatric heart surgeon who has operated on 1,200 children.

"This is something that can jeopardize the country's well-being," added Mr. Camacho, who in recent speech said the governor's bloc is akin to a secessionist movement. "It is about war and peace and too delicate for them to do what they want."

The group also has the most unlikely governor in Colombia, Mr. Tunubalá a Guambiano Indian who won office in a province well known for discrimination and social inequality. Mr. Tunubalá's political movement—composed of Indians, union leaders, poor farmers, intellectuals and others outside the province's circle of power—has already angered some people in Cauca and prompted death threats.

The other governors, longtime local politicians, are from Huila and the two provinces where most of Colombia's coca grows, Putumayo and Caquetá.

The governors acknowledge that local officials have more control since the country's 1991 Constitution gave regional leaders more decisionmaking powers and resources.

But revenue is still raised by the central government. The six provinces, the size of Kansas and with a combined population of six million, also remain desperately poor and rural in a largely urban country.

The region also contains three-quarters of the country's coca crops and nearly all the poppy fields, employing 335,000 people in all.

The very fact that an alliance exists is "essentially a cry for help, a collective petition for the government to do something," said Larry Birns, a Colombia expert and director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs in Washington. "These are governors that, because they come from peripheral states, have been neglected."

The issue that most unites the governors is their opposition to defoliation, which they warn alienates their constituents without resolving the problems, that lead farmers to cultivate illegal crops.

Juan de Jesús Cárdenas, governor of Huila, said regional leaders across the south believed that defoliation would simply drive farmers to cultivate coca and poppies in other regions.

"That is what has happened with defoliation of Putumayo, with the movement of displaced people into Nariño," said the governor, whose province serves as a corridor for drugs and rebels.

The governors want to replace illicit crops by prodding farmers to eradicate in exchange for subsidies and markets for their products. The Colombian government, with American money and expertise, is running such a program, but the governors said they were working to tailor their own programs to meet the needs of farmers in their provinces.

"We need gradual eradication," said Mr. Tunubalá. "We need to put in new crops, and we need to look for markets nationally and internationally."

That was the reason for Mr. Jaramillo's recent trip to a mountainous rebel-controlled region in southern Tolima. There, Mr. Jaramillo met with farmers to urge them to participate in the eradication program financed by the Americans. It was not easy. Most had felt ignored by a central government they view as inept and unresponsive.

Several farmers, after meeting with Mr. Jaramillo, said they would not have agreed to meet with or participate had it not been for the governor, whom they view as independent from Bogotá. Leftist rebels who showed up uninvited—and had the power to quash any government plan in the region—allowed farmers to move forward in part because of Mr. Jaramillo's involvement.

"He from these lands," said one farmer, Ramiro Pérez, 38 standing on a steep mountain where he grows poppies. "We've seen him here. He has worked hard to get here. Maybe that means good news."

[From the Berkshire Eagle, Sept. 2, 2000]

#### SOME AMERICAN STRUGGLES

(By Mark Miller)

PITTSFIELD—This week, the president of the United States spent part of a day in Cartagena, Colombia, talking about the drug trade and democracy. The president of Peru announced a new trial for an American serving a life sentence as a convicted terrorist. Venezuela's politics were eclipsed by reports of lawsuits over defective Firestone tires there. Nicaragua continue to be absent from our news while, as usual, we Americans could walk into a discount store and get bargains on back-to-school clothes stitched in Nicaragua.

#### WASHINGTON REPORT ON THE HEMISPHERE

Washington Report on the Hemisphere is a biweekly newsletter from the Council on Hemispheric Affairs that keeps a sharp eye on the rest of the Americas outside the United States. The Aug. 7 and 16 issues (COHA is no slave to the calendar) both lead off with updates on the exploits of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's immensely popular though unconventional president. I'd forgotten he had engineered the renaming of his nation the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, after Simon Bolivar, the Venezuelan leader in early 19th-century South American struggles for independence from Spain.

Chavez "made a healthy start on his campaign promise to weed out the systematic corruption infesting the ranks of the bureaucracy, by sacking hundreds of judges from all layers of the country's notorious judiciary that was plagued by unabated nepotism and inefficiency. His next move was to bring about some badly needed new management to this state oil company (Petroleos de Venezuela) that, as stated in the new constitution, will forever be insulated from privatization."

Business investors are unenthusiastic about Chavez. Note is made (crediting an Economist Intelligence Unit report) of "the rapid rate at which foreign firms are packing up and leaving over concerns of an increasingly hostile business climate. Historically, foreign investment has been an Achilles heel for Venezuela, averaging a mere 2 percent of its [gross domestic product] over the past decade."

Chavez has visited Cuba five times since 1998, recently praising Fidel Castro's "visionary work," and has been cultivating leaders in "oil-exporting hubs including Libya, Iraq and Iran in an effort to convince these OPEC nations to sustain the high price of gasoline . . ." Chavez has been criticized within his own country for his bold moves to freely associate himself with rogue nations, thereby going out of his way to damage relations with the U.S., which remains the largest importer of Venezuelan oil."

[From the New York Times, Dec. 18, 2000]

#### LATIN AMERICA IS PRIORITY ON BUSH TRADE AGENDA

(By Anthony DePalma)

He may not be comfortable discussing unrest in East Timor, or pronouncing the name of the leaders of Turkmenistan, but President-elect George W. Bush considers the rest of the Western Hemisphere "our backyard" and will have several opportunities in his first year in office to make Latin America a trade and foreign policy priority.

During the campaign, Mr. Bush said he would kickstart the stalled process of getting a free trade agreement of the Americas signed by 2005. The agreement would build on the North American Free Trade Agreement, which went into effect in 1994, and would unite 34 of the countries in North, Central and South America into what President Clinton once said would be "the world's largest market."

The first order of business would be a bruising battle in a divided Congress over fast-track authority, the legislative tool that Mr. Bush will need to negotiate a comprehensive trade deal. Under fast track, trade deals are brought to Congress for approval only when complete. Congress then votes on the agreement without having the chance to add amendments that suit the needs and wishes of individual members.